

The King still rules

He began his music career at the young age of 16, with the ghazals of Ghalib, Daag, Mir and Jigar on All India Radio, Lucknow. His voice had a distinct quality. HMV was quick to notice this and offered Talat his first disc in 1941, *Sab din ek samaan nahin tha*. In 1944, came the smash hit *Tasveer teri dil mera behela na sakegi*. It took the country by storm and is popular even today.

After this disc, Talat was beckoned by the Calcutta Film Industry, the hub of film production in the 40's. Apart from hit songs, he also acted in three films: *Rajlaxmi*, *Tum Aur Main* and *Sampati*. When he came to Bombay in 1949, his fame had

end, producers began besieging him with acting offers. Talat was to finally accept 13 films, with top heroines like Nutan, Mala Sinha and Nadira. "He, however, felt that acting interfere with his singing and refused further offers," points out Khalid. In the late 1960s, the filmi ghazals gave way to faster Western rhythms. "Unhappy with the new trend towards loud meaningless music, he decided to cut down his playback singing, but continued his non-film ghazal recordings," remembers his son.

The laurels, of course, kept pouring in. He was the recipient of many awards and recognitions, including the Padmabhushan, Maharashtra State Government Film Award, Lata Mangeshkar Puraskar, Alami Urdu Conference Award and Naushad Ali Award. In 1956, Talat became the first Indian playback singer to go abroad for a concert, which extended from six to 25 shows in East Africa. "In 1961, a record crowd of 58,000 fans packed the Karachi Stadium to listen The King sing," beams a proud Khalid adding, "EMI, Karachi, honoured him with a Silver Disc, making him the first singer in the Indian sub-continent to receive a silver disc."

In 1969-91, he toured USA and Canada on several occasions, at venues like Madison Square Garden. His popularity prompted famous New York television host, Joe Franklin, to invite Talat to his hugely popular programme *The Joe Franklin Show*. A ballet, based entirely on Talat's songs, was created by *The Joel Jay Fisher Ballet Company* in New York. In 1979, Talat performed at a sell-out show at the Royal Albert Hall. He was the second playback singer, after Lata Mangeshkar, to perform at this historical venue. Over the years, he also toured Holland, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Muscat and Mauritius. Though he passed away on May 9, 1998, the King of Ghazals has created a repertoire of songs for generations to come. His fan following covers the globe. He strides like a colossus in the field of ghazals — a King whose name is surpassed by none!

Musical King, Talat Mahmood, with Uttam Kumar (right) and Mehdi Hassan (below)



already preceded him and he was offered the song *Ae dil mujhe aisi jagha le chal* composed by Anil Biswas. The record was an overnight success and set the trend for the filmi ghazal.

In Talat, music directors found perfect diction and emotional nuances: mellowness, sweetness and pathos. His fan following included Shanker Jaikishan, Naushad, Laxmikant Pyarelal, O P Nayyar, SD Burman and Salil Choudhury. Little wonder then that Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Shashi Kapoor, Dev Anand and Guru Dutt were found singing in his voice. Besides Urdu/Hindi he also sang in 11 other languages.

Even as his singing gave him the status of a leg-

DILIP KUMAR:

Talat was a wonderful human being and a perfect gentleman. His ghazals were revolutionary and modern for their time. There was a uniqueness in his voice and his songs touched peoples hearts. When I would act to his playbacks, I would put in an extra effort to match his singing prowess.

LATA MANGESHKAR:

I have sung many duets with Talat-



hab and always enjoyed a wonderful rapport with him. I first heard his heart-warming songs on the radio. We all were already his fans, by the time he came to Bombay. His voice is the only one in this film industry, which has never been copied!

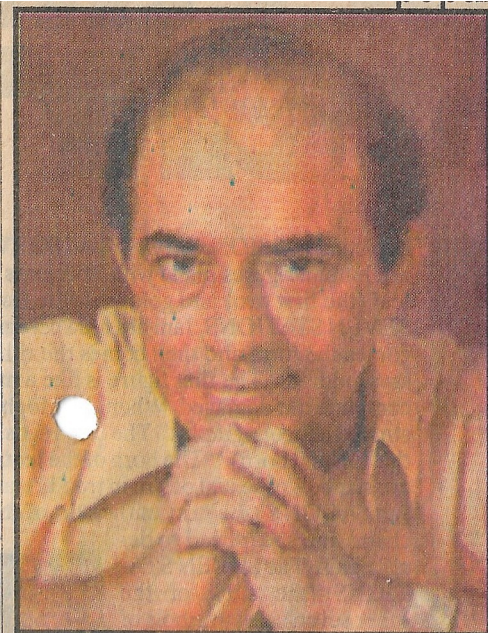
JAGJIT SINGH

I was weaned on Talat Mahmood because, much before he became popular, he was already the King. If you notice, Mehdi Hassan sings (in the same soft style) like him! There's very little difference.



MEHDI HASSAN

It was through the vocals of Talat *sahab* that I discovered the goldmine in my throat. His songs like *Ek main hoon ek meri bekaasi ki shaam hai* and *Husn walon ko na dil do* have left a lasting impression on me. It was while singing these numbers on stage, in the early years of my career, that I held an audience of 10,000 in Pindi spellbound! Believe it or not, they showered me with money. In a trice I had collected almost about Rs 14,000! All this was, of course, courtesy Talat *sahab*!



THE velvety voice that enthralled millions of fans will now resonate in the virtual world, too. A website (www.talatmahmood.com) devoted to the well-known ghazal and playback singer, the late Talat Mahmood, has been painstakingly put together by his son Khalid Mahmood.

"Very little is known about my father and we received requests from fans all over the world to compile a book on him," points out Khalid, a well-known ghazal exponent himself. Khalid Mahmood is also the first to record a complete pop ghazal album in the US, with an all-American crew. He adds: "Someone suggested the Net. And looking at its outreach, I settled for cyberspace instead of print." Trivia, rare pictures with the who's who of the music world, comments from eminent personalities, an exhaustive list of recorded songs: these are all the highlights of the website.

'King of Ghazals' Talat Mahmood was born in Lucknow on February 24, 1924. His father, Manzoor Mahmood, owned an electrical curio store. Talat showed musical leanings from a very young age and would enjoy sitting through all-night music soirees, listening to some of the biggest names in Indian classical music. Later, for a short period of time, he studied music at Marris Music College, before people began noticing his natural singing talent and offers began to pour in.